Music boxes are typically a stand alone, self-playing, musical instrument wherein tuned metal teeth on a steel comb are plucked by manner of a metal pin or depression set in a musical composition. The cylinder type is an earlier style of music box originating in Switzerland that used a horizontally mounted cylinder made of wood or metal, inset with metal pins as its musical storage device. These pins would be used to directly strike the tuned steel teeth. The disk type is a later style of music box that came from Germany, using a stamped metal disk with perforations punched through it to actuate a wheel that would pluck the comb. The organette type is a combination of the cylinder type music workings with a reed organ housing. The cardboard or cylinder would open valves releasing air through and over reeds to create sound.

Most makers of the disc and cylinder music box of the late 19th century went out of business by 1910. A few companies survived past 1920 by diversifying production to include cameras, typewriters, and some made the transition to phonographs.

The thirteen late 19th century music boxes in this exhibition are placed throughout the Farm House Museum. Match the number on this sheet to each music box to learn more about the specific style, music, and history of the box. All music boxes are generous gifts to the permanent collection from Donald Larew.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key dates in Music Box History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1796</strong> - First real music box mechanism appears, normally credited to a Swiss watchmaker named Antonie Farve. In this model, metal pins strike a set of tuned laminated teeth making tones without the use of bells or strings. This design allowed the miniaturization of mechanical music works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1802</strong> - A flat type of mechanical movement was created using a flat disk inset with pins. It allowed watch sized musical trinkets to have a greater range. • The first cylinder type music boxes appear. Where a clock might only have about 100 pins, these music boxes could have up to 10,000 pins greatly improving range and playtime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1810 -1815</strong> - Music box production moves from individual craftsmen to a cottage industrial model with watchmakers and metalworkers creating parts in their homes before trading in bulk orders for assembly in small workshops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1830-1860</strong> - Music box production ranged from small to mid sized. • Key wound mechanics inside plain wooden boxes became popular. • The craftsmen of this time were more concerned with tonal quality than aesthetic embellishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1860-1870</strong> - Music boxes grow in size to include more ornate boxes and larger playing ranges and times. This is largely due to the international expos of 1851 and 1862. • Music box production becomes big business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1875</strong> - First production line factory for music boxes in St Croix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1876</strong> - Organettes begin commercial production in both Germany and the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1870-1890</strong> - Cylinder type music box production was at its height with all sizes and shape of musical products. • Extensively inlaid cases and multiple cylinders, some removable, others on a revolving base, mark this era as the most technically challenging period for cylinder type manufacturing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1886</strong> - First interchangeable disk type music box is made in Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1889</strong> - Paul Wendland of Symphonion Musikwerks patents the star wheel which serves as the linchpin of disk type music boxes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1894</strong> - By this time Symphonion Musikwerks had split into Symphonion and Polyphon Musikwerks, and Regina in America accounting for the majority of music box manufacture. They are commonly referred to as the “Big 3” in collectors’ circles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1895</strong> - Due to the increased volume produced by disk type music boxes and aggressive marketing by the top three manufacturers, cylinder type box companies were put almost entirely out of business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1895-1905</strong> - Height of disk type music box production with multiple sizes and operation styles being produced for use in the home, as well as in taverns, and in public waiting areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1905-1922</strong> - The phonograph begins production and captures the majority of home audiences. • The production of music boxes dwindles bit by bit with the eventual merger or bankruptcy of the main manufacturing companies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Terms

**Inlay:** Almost all music boxes from the small table sized versions to the larger coin operated gambling boxes had some sort of wood inlay in their case. Most of these layered wood pieces would be geometric in nature with the expensive boxes showing large natural or landscape scenes.

**Airs:** The majority of music boxes on the market today play multiple songs, called airs. This is achieved by having multiple songs set in a single cylinder, multiple cylinders set in or with a music box, or in disk type boxes, multiple disks.

**Tune Indicator:** On cylinder type boxes with multiple airs a lever would be pushed as the cylinder turned to play different pins with different airs. This lever would then show against a backing plate which airs was being played. It is normally located close to the back left of the box.

**Tooth:** The thin metal bar struck by pin or tab that resonated and created the music box tones. There could be any number of teeth on one or multiple combs in a music box.

**Comb:** The metal bar that was cut to length and notched to create the teeth discussed earlier. There could be single or multiple combs in one box depending on the tonal qualities desired by the music box creator. Typically exposed in cylinder type boxes and screwed to the base plate for easy removal and tuning.

**Zither:** Music box attachment that applies a hollow cylinder of tissue paper to the comb, producing a pizzicato or plucked string effect.

**Damper** (or Dampening Blocks): The fine quill or wire mounted under the tip of a cylinder music box tooth, or mechanical device in a disc box, which mutes or dampens the sound of a percussion instrument.

---

**Music Box # 1**

Type: Single Cylinder/ Multiple Tunes  
Country of Origin: Probably France. Sold in U.S.A.  
Date of Manufacture: 1870-1880

This music box, a “Harpe Eolienne” model, is a sub-make of the sublime harmony music boxes made in the 1870s and on. It gathers its name from its two or more combs, with similar tuning, to create a more powerful sound while retaining its bright tonal quality. This particular box has two separate combs, one looking to be tuned to a higher octave, and a zither attachment to create a mandolin like plucking. It is rare to see intact zither attachments on music boxes as most were removed and discarded when their owners found that the attachment deadened the sound of the comb more than was acceptable.

There are many details on this box that are not found in the rest of the collection. The inlay on the lid of this box is in almost perfect condition. It shows a beautiful floral pattern and has muted and intriguing colors. This box also has an ivory keyhole cover. This is a unique detail in the collection and a rare material to be used in this era of music boxes where most locks were made of brass or silver.

This music box is capable of playing 10 airs and has a rich tonal quality. It is more than capable of filling a room with music. The detailing on the zither attachment as well as the playback and tune selection levers show a marked increase in the work put into this box. It was most likely a late 1870s model intended for upper middle class consumption.
Music Box #2

Type: Single Cylinder / Multiple Tunes
Manufacture and Country of Origin: Unknown
Date of Manufacture: 1870-1890

This cylinder type music box is what most people would identify as the archetypal music box. It has a single cylinder that is capable of playing eight airs. It is fully self-contained and has a crank wind lever instead of a key. To operate this music box one simply rotates the crank lever in the left most section of the music box case and moves the switch located opposite the crank from “Stop” to “Play”. This switch moves a lever that engages the music box to release the wound spring thereby turning the cylinder. There is another switch on the box that prevents or allows the cylinder to switch tunes.

The cylinder in this box is of a stationary type; it was not designed to be removed. It is a brass cylinder with steel wire pins inset. These pins directly pluck the comb in the front of the music box. Multiple tunes are stored on this cylinder by allowing some of the pins to pass through the spaces between the 50 teeth on the comb. As the cylinder rotates, and a new airs is cued up, the cylinder shifts horizontally to align a new set of pins with the comb. This actuates the register lever touching the cylinder and displays the airs number.

The case for this music box is made of a dark stained wood and has a sophisticated inlay pattern on its lid. The box also stands on four individual feet, which is slightly uncommon to see as many boxes had feet carved from the main case.

This music box has a single piece comb attached to its baseboard by multiple screws. This, along with the number of teeth and quality of sound produced, dates the manufacturing somewhere between 1870 and 1890 —the height of cylinder type manufacture.

Music Box #3

Type: Disk
Manufacturer: Symphonion Musikwerks
Country of Origin: Leipzig, Germany
Date of Manufacture: 1895 to 1905

This Symphonion disk type music box is a second-generation example of the small to mid sized music boxes produced by Symphonion Musikwerks from 1895 to 1917. Symphonion Musikwerks was one of Germany’s largest manufacturers of disc music boxes and also sold automatic pianos and phonographs after the 1900s.

The box is operated by winding the removable crank along the right side of the case and pulling out the knob located on the left side of the case. This begins the center drive system that rotates the steel stamped disk. This is a simpler mechanism than the edge drive used in larger disk music boxes and requires fewer manufacturing steps. Once the disk is set and locked into place with the retaining rod it is ready for play.

The disk itself is an “in-house” Symphonion produced disk due to its unique projections. The projections turn sections of a star shaped wheel, which in turn pluck or strike the teeth of the music comb. This is what produces the actual sound. The No. 10 disk plays a very short piece of music, about 30 seconds, and is painted with “Annie Laurie ov Ch Grace”. The disk is numbered 7098, which means it was the 98th tune to be produced on Symphonions 7000 series disk.

The music box itself is of a dark hardwood, probably stained oak. Some of the higher-end European crafters boxes would have a mahogany veneer over oak.
**Music Box # 4**

Type: Disk  
Manufacturer: Mermod Frères  
Country of Origin: St. Croix, Switzerland  
Date of Manufacture: Last stamped patent date April 25, 1905. Design first patented June 27, 1897.

This disk type music box resembles an illustrated ad for a small single comb Mira music box circa 1900. It is a rather standard design for a disk type box, the exception being its crank design. The removable crank for this box is concealed inside the cask. This is opposed to the majority of boxes with an external crank mounted on the side panel of the case.

This music box plays 9¼ inch disks and is operated by placing the disk on the center wheel and pulling back the holding wheels at the back and front of the box. Once the disk is secure, one uses the crank lever to turn the internal spring via the shaft in the front right of the box. Then it is a simple matter of turning the play lever to PLAY and dialing in the playback speed using the lever at the back of the box. This would allow tunes of different tempos to be put on a standard disk that may have otherwise removed too much metal from a disk.

The Mira, and also Stella, music box companies were some of the longer lasting Swiss music companies. Most of the others went out of business because they refused to change from cylinder type boxes to disk type. The aggressive marketing and cheaper components of the disk type manufacturers made the cylinder type market obsolete by 1895. This being said, the larger Stella and Mira boxes are regarded as some of the best tonal quality and workmanship of all disk type boxes and are valued highly by collectors.

---

**Music Box # 5**

Type: Single Cylinder/ Multiple Tunes with 3 Bell Attachment  
Manufacturer: Unknown  
Country of Origin: Switzerland  
Date of Manufacture: 1870-1890

This music box is unique among the Farm House Museum collection. It is a prime example of the many little additions that could be integrated into the standard cylinder type music box. This box has three bells that play in tandem with the cylinder proper and create a deeper musical experience. There could be all manner of extras attached to music boxes of this sort, from bells and small percussion drums, to individual violin strings. That makes this particular music box the distant cousin of the player pianos of the 1920s.

Forty-three teeth give this box a larger range than would be normal for a box this size. It has a good bright volume and decent range due to its smaller brass base plate. To operate, one pulls back the crank lever on the left of the cylinder and moves the selector lever to “PLAY” on the right of the box. The cylinder pins strike the comb, as well as actuating the small bell hammers.

The music box plays 8 airs: Little Annie Rooney; Mikado Valse - Baccalosse; Hush! The Bogies, Lutz; Killaloe Long, Martin; Sister Mary Walked Like That, Long; Ask a Policeman, Durandeau; Funiculi, Funicula; and Do Ra Mi Fa, Loya.

The case for this box is in better shape than most. It is solidly constructed from its feet to its lid with no cracks and only minimal scuffing on its faces. The inlay is intact with only a small portion on the lid beginning to bow. The top paintwork is completely gone, perhaps due to decay and flaking of the colors. Only small traces of what was once an intricate floral pattern now remain.
**Music Box #6**

Type: Single Cylinder / Multiple Tunes  
Manufacturer and Country of Origin: Unknown  
Date of Manufacture: 1860-1870

This cylinder type music box is in great condition and is an example of the music boxes produced pre 1880 when more work was put into crafting a music box that sounded pleasant rather than one that could play many tunes by sacrificing tonal quality. This box has 67 teeth on a single piece comb. This allows for a broad range and multiple airs to be stored, six in this case.

The mechanics of this box are in fantastic condition. The spring winding lever as well as the spring drum work flawlessly and keep the cylinder playback on tempo. There is no tune indicator with this music box, and there are no marks or holes to indicate there ever had been one. One presumes that the tunes popularity allowed them to be recognized rather than comparing tune indicator with playing card.

The case for this music box is painted black inside and has a dark stained veneer on its exterior. The inlay on the lid of this case is in good shape missing only a small portion of the border on the left edge. The case has a recessed brass lock with only an exposed keyhole. This is unlike the majority of cases with an exposed lock plate on the front of the case.

There are no markings apparent on this music box to show where it was manufactured or by whom. This is not unusual in earlier music box production and the manufacturers stamp or seal may be on the underside of the base plate as was common in that era.

---

**Music Box #7**

Type: Cylinder  
Manufacturer: P. Van Leevwen  
Country of Origin: Amsterdam, Netherlands  
Date of Manufacture: 1870-1890

Like Music Box #3 this is another easily identifiable cylinder type music box produced during the most popular era for their production. However, there are slight differences between these two boxes.

This box has the standard crank winding mechanism on the left side of the box and the two-switch control system on the right, however the switches on this box are not labeled. The cylinder on this box is capable of playing six airs and is of the non-removable type. It is a brass cylinder with metal inset pins. The single piece comb on this box is missing a large portion of its teeth and the teeth that are intact are missing their fine points. In short, there is physically no way for this box to play.

The case for this music box has fared a bit better than its inner workings. The case has intact veneer on all of its exposed faces, and the lid has a unique inlay showing an artist’s brush and paint easel. Like most music boxes of the era, this case has a simple lock mechanism between the lid and the front of the box. This box does have an interesting detail in the front face panel. A pair of large metal screws work as a visual placeholder and add to the appeal of the case woodwork.
**Music Box #8**

Type: Organette Single Cylinder/ Single Tune (26 cylinders with this box)
Manufacturer and Country of Origin: Unknown
Date of Manufacture: October 1899

The “Home Music Box” as it states in large painted letters, is closer to a player organ than to a traditional cylinder type music box. It is stamped Oct. 18, 1899 on its underside below the printed directions for use and maintenance.

This box operates in much the way a traditional cylinder type music box would, the exception being that instead of striking metal teeth, the pins on this box cause a lever operated key to be played much like a clarinet. Due to the size of this box as well as the space needed to play each key this box plays only one song per cylinder.

The cylinders for this box are made of a soft wood with metal pins. The pins are arranged in strips to play longer and shorter notes rather than striking once like the metal comb music boxes. The mechanics of the box are the same though. This box needs constant cranking to operate the double bellows and to push enough air through to create tones.

This box is of a light wood, both in color and weight. It is painted black with gold embellishments. The mechanics and keys are of machined steel. The keys and bellows are of a felt and leather design with a wooden structure giving the bellows a strong backing.

---

**Music Box #9**

Type: Organette, “Roller Organ,” or “Autophone”
Manufacturer: Unknown
Country of Origin: U.S.A.
Date of Manufacture: 1876-1900

The Organette or “roller organ” as it was sometimes referred as in America, is the culmination of multiple technological innovations dating from the fifteenth century on. The first iteration of the organette was sometime in the mid 1870s. The particular date is debated as more than three separate companies fought over its patent rights. It is best used as an indoor instrument due to its size and its musical range. This, along with its natural sound quality made it well suited for playing both well known hymns and patriotic music.

The organette works by forcing air through a set of reeds. Both single and dual reed designs were constructed during the production age of the organette, and each version had its own unique sound characteristics. One simply turns the hand crank on the front of the box and air is forced through the leather bellows concealed under the box and out the opened valves. Attachments were made to enhance the natural reed sound but for the most part were found to muddy the tonal quality of most boxes.

This organette does have a removable cylinder and it has sixteen separate cylinders attached to it. The cylinder is removed and replaced by pulling the button on the right side of the cylinder and working the cylinder out away from the case. Replacing the cylinder is as simple as lining up the drilled holes on the end of the cylinder with the rotating arm on the left side of the box, pulling the brass button to make room for the cylinder, and rotating it in.
**Music Box #10**

Type: Manivelle (Hand Crank)  
Manufacturer: Unknown  
Country of Origin: Switzerland  
Date of Manufacture: Unknown, but this style was popular c. 1895.

This is a children’s music box. A popular toy throughout the 1860s to 1900 and judging by its shape was probably enjoyed as such for many years. This box is of Swiss origin due to the large word “SWISS” stamped into its case. This particular style was also known to have been made by dozens of small shops all over Switzerland.

Music boxes of this size and sophistication were built by jewelers and watchmakers throughout the 19th century. Some were miniaturized versions of the larger cylinder type boxes but many others had individual teeth set at angles to be struck by a rotating wheel. The majority of these smaller children’s toys were spring wound but this version is a Manivelle type, which means it is a hand-cranked box with no internal spring.

It is hard to determine when this piece was constructed but it bares a striking similarity to the most popular styles in circulation from 1895. This box plays two airs, but unfortunately the decal on the underside is far too deteriorated (no more than a slight representation of the original label remains) to tell what those airs would be.

There is a good chance that this particular music box was acquired by a middle class family for a child, perhaps for Christmas, in the mid 1890s.

---

**Music Box #11**

Type: Single Cylinder/ Multiple Tunes  
Manufacturer: Unknown  
Country of Origin: Switzerland  
Date of Manufacture: 1870-1890

This cylinder type music box is capable of playing twelve songs. This accounts for the extended cylinder size and subsequent weight of the box. The 62 teeth on a single piece comb give this box a large range and a pleasant sound due to the very fine tip on each tooth. The dampening blocks are in good shape as is the cylinder itself. A solid brass base seems to have kept the mechanics of this music box in good shape despite it being unable to play.

There are multiple embellishments and detail work that went into the boxes crank lever, its lock plate, and its tune indicator. Looking at these two things one could surmise that this music box was a Swiss made model of mid to high price, purchased and shipped especially for a single client.

This music box is an example of the better music boxes one could find in the 1880s or so. It is not as mechanically complicated as the artisan boxes of the 1860s but it is an interesting example of a well-crafted box in an era of mass production.
Music Box #12

Type: Single Cylinder/ Multiple tunes  
Manufacturer: Unknown  
Country of Origin: Switzerland  
Date of Manufacture: 1870-1895

This Swiss made “Excelsior-Piccolo” cylinder music box is an example of the mass produced boxes on the market in the later 19th century. Its detailing is meant to invoke connections to the earlier, artisan built, music boxes of the 1860s. This box however, was most likely crafted for mass consumption by the middle class public.

This box is interesting as it has an adjustable plate above the comb that can be lowered into contact with it. This was called a “zither” attachment. These were marketed to create a double note and make the music more enticing, however it seemed to only deaden the natural sound of the comb and as such they were usually removed and discarded. To have an intact zither attachment is quite rare.

The 13-inch cylinder stores 12 airs and is of a non-removable design. The downside to such a large amount of music is that sacrifices in musical range had to be made. There are only 62 teeth in this box, far less than what would be found in a smaller box made decades earlier. The solid brass base plate combined with the sheer size of this box does give it a room filling range. This box is of a later design because the base plate is shaped to support the inner mechanics of the box but not to absorb any more vibration than was absolutely necessary.

Like other cylinder designs one winds the play spring by means of the crank lever and begins playback with the lower lever on the right side of the cylinder housing.

Music Box #13

Type: Single Cylinder/ Multiple tunes  
Manufacturer and Country of Origin: Unknown  
Date of Manufacture: 1870-1900

This cylinder music box plays multiple tunes including: La Marsellaise, De Wacht Am Rhein, Carnival of Venice, Mandolinata, Monastery Bells, and La Paloma.

The golden coloration and rose inlay make this a handsome addition to any home.

Sources
- The Musical Box Society International: www.mbsi.org